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WBBM's Bob Roberts reports.

Metra officials reaffirmed the increase Friday, one day after the governor and legislative leaders reached agreement on a bill that will provide \$494 million in new funding to Chicago-area mass transit.

While Metra is in line to receive \$107 million a year from the bill, officials said it needs the money to pay back \$165 million that it took from its capital funds to pay everyday bills for the past four years.

That money ultimately will go toward repair and rehabilitation of trains, tracks and bridges and could be used to leverage release of some of the federal funding that is set aside for Metra in Washington.

Metra Chair Carole Doris said that the increase, which was supposed to be the first of at least three yearly 10 percent fare increases, will make fare hikes unnecessary next year and in 2010.

"When we went out to public hearing we didn't tell that it'd be 10 per cent and then if we got the money that would go away and all of our problems would be solved," Doris said. "We laid out for them a very detailed analysis of what it takes to keep the railroad running, and what it's going to take to get the enhancements that we need."

Doris said Metra also hopes to forge ahead with expansion, including two new lines: the STAR Line linking O'Hare with Hoffman Estates and Joliet, and the SouthEast Service, that would link the Loop with far south suburban Crete.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) warned this week that unless local funding matches can be found soon, Chicago-area mass transit agencies stand to lose billions in federal funding. Doris said that this would provide some of that match.

The commuter rail agency already began charging the increase in fares, expected to be about \$11 a month for the average commuter using a monthly pass, when it sent out pay-by-mail notices to many of its riders.

The vast majority of Metra riders use monthly passes.

The increase is the first in two years, only the sixth in Metra's 24-year history and twice the size of any previous increase.